

Editorial

## A Chance to Dream

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The Senate has a chance today to pluck a small gem from the ashes of the immigration debate. A critical procedural vote is scheduled on the Dream Act, a bill to open opportunities for college and military service to the children of undocumented immigrants.

Roughly 65,000 children graduate each year from high school into a constrained future because they cannot work legally or qualify for most college aid. These are the overlooked bystanders to the ferocious bickering over immigration. They did not ask to be brought here, have worked hard in school and could, given the chance, hone their talents and become members of the homegrown, high-skilled American work force.

The bill is one of the least controversial immigration proposals that have been offered in the last five years. But that doesn't mean much. Like everything else not directly involving border barricades and punishment, it has been branded as "amnesty," and has languished.

But this bill is different, starting with its broad, bipartisan support, from its original sponsor, the Utah Republican Orrin Hatch, to its current champion, Richard Durbin, Democrat of Illinois. Repeated defeats have forced Mr. Durbin to pare away at the bill's ambitions. It focuses now on a narrow sliver of a worthy group: children who entered the country before age 16, lived here continuously for at least five years and can show good moral character and a high school diploma. They would receive conditional legal status for six years, during which they could work, go to college and serve in the military. If they completed at least two years of college or military service, they would be eligible for legalization.

These young people — their numbers are estimated at anywhere from a million to fewer than 100,000 — are in many ways fully American, but their immigration status puts a lock on their potential right after high school. They face the prospect of living in the shadows as their parents do, fearing deportation to countries they do not know, yearning to educate themselves in a country that ignores their aspirations.

The Dream Act rejects that unacceptable waste of young talent. The opportunity is there, provided the votes are there in the Senate.